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Atari Online News, Etc.
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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

Another terrific week here in New England! Although most of the leaves in my neighborhood are probably sitting in my backyard, I can't complain about the weather so far this autumn. And, I have to admit that a good portion of the leaves from my trees are being cleaned up by my neighbors! <grin>

I have to admit that I'm not surprised that Microsoft is being let off "the hook" somewhat. After all these years and lots of the taxpayers' money, I think the Justice Department should have been more harsh. I seriously doubt that the states' claims will prove to be any more productive, as a result. In a few days, we'll know that outcome.

I don't have a lot to say this week, either. It's been a long week at work and I'm running late getting this week's issue out. I'm hoping that next week things settle down to a more "normal" pace and I can get things done according to my schedule rather than being adversely affected by others.

Until next time...

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New ATF Forums

Hello,

Atari Users Network, TAIO (The Atari International Organization) and
A-ONE Magazine have created a new Atari Forum call ATF - Atari Talk Forums.

Stop by and check them out!

ATF-Atari Talk Forums
http://forums.atari-users.net

Atari Users Network
http://www.atari-users.net

TAIO
http://www.atari-international.org

A-ONE Magazine
http://www.atarinews.org

New Contest

As promised, a new contest was announced today. The challenge: turn the word ATARI into an acronym! For Example:

Amazing
Terrific
Ancient
Really cool
Interesting

Pretty easy, huh? I'll even be lenient and let you use multiple words or phrases for each letter. Such as:

An Atari is my friend
Together we are winners
Age doesn't matter..
...And so forth.

The prize: Set of 3 miniature Star Trek ornaments for your Christmas tree: It all started with the USS Enterprise, under the command of Captain Kirk, whose mission was to go "where no man has gone before." These futuristic flying vessels are compilations of engineering magnificence, built to withstand extreme changes in temperature and atmosphere›not to mention the dreaded Klingons.

And.. a 2002 Canadian wall calendar.

Value: about $30.00 CAD

Deadline for submissions: Sunday, November 4, 2001.

How to enter: simply send an email with your acronym to support@magical-sides.de. By doing so, you give permission to us to use our entry in any way we choose. The winner will be contacted by email.

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING

compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Last week, I mentioned that I was happy to see the fall foliage and to feel the temperature drop.

Well, Mother Nature must have read that column too, because the leaves are now in full color, and yesterday’s temperature was an unseasonably cool 42 degrees.

In the middle of a very busy day at work, I was in the process of walking from one building to another when I caught a whiff of the fallen leaves. You know the smell that I’m talking about... vaguely like tea leaves.

The sense of smell is a truly remarkable thing. Smell can bring back memories in a way and to an extent that no other sense can.

One whiff of those leaves and I was a mildly adventurous thirteen year old, walking through the woods behind his home.

Although I wouldn’t want to be that thirteen year old again, it’s nice to have the memories at-the-ready.

Thinking about the sense of smell’s ability to bring back memories in such a powerful way, I remember a circumstance a few years ago at work when an electrical unit shorted out. The sharp smell of ozone was very noticeable, and I got a powerful urge to pull my first ST... a 1040 STF... out of the closet and get it running again.

It was the first time I had ever had a power supply go bad. The smell of that electrical unit brought me right back to the 1040 fritzing out on me.

Now let me see... where IS that 1040?

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
==========

Last week, there was a conversation about designing a "mini" ST. This week Michael Schwingen posts:

"The biggest problem is probably that many parts are now out of production - the sound chip definitely, the FDC also. I am not sure about the ACIA (you could implement them in a CPLD, too), and even the MPF is getting more difficult to get nowadays.

Everything that is done by Glue, MMU and Shifter (including video) can easily be done using some modern CPLD/FPGA.

If you really start to make something like this in a way that can be produced in more-than-one quantities, you will end up with something like the Milan II design."

Chris Martin chimes in and posts:

"Why not use an FPGA and emulate the whole ST in on one chip, complete with 68000 and the custom chips. Put it on a board that is generic enough to allow you to program the FPGA with a different "computer". Say you want to run a TT instead of an ST, just download the code for a 68030 and other chips....

Well, okay, things might be more difficult than that, but it would be

possible. Also, I think it would be possible to make a CPU replacement with an FPGA. Write the code to emulate a 68030 and run it at 200MHz (with today's FPGAs). If you plug this into your Atari as a cpu replacement/accelerator, you could see some cool speed-ups...."

Peter Persson adds:

"Actually, creating a hardware platform, a new motherboard, is not a very good idea. It is possible to make a kickass Atari clone using emulation on a PC. PC hardware is very fast at a low price. A new atari motherboard would probably be slower and cost 10 times as much. All existing emulators tries to behave as ST-compatible as possible. What we need is a 68030+emulator and direct access to the PC hardware or custom emulated hardware layer. It should be compatible enough to run MiNT, or perhaps the other way around - MiNT should be adapted to work on the emulator. Perhaps there could be some application interface to access native x86 code too."

'Dan S' asks about peripherals:

"What is the best device to buy that will enable an ide or scsi drive to be connected to an atari mega1 or ste?

device must be plug and play (as in it should include drivers and be easy to fit & set up)."

James Alexander tells Dan:

"there are a few available, your best bet is to try the search engines looking for Link 96 or Link 97 for scsi host adaptors, Also look up Mario Becroft, he's got a few upgrades he's made including an ide adaptor"

Dan asks James:

"Thanks for the link...I checked out Mario Becroft's ide controller and the link97 cable, the only difference I suppose apart from one being scsi and the other ide is that Mario's one has a TOS upgrade included and is a little more expensive.

Is the TOS upgrade really worth it? What advantages does the TOS upgrade give?"

James replies:

"I think Mario's board has TOS 2.6 on it. I haven't used it much even though I do have a 520ST upgraded to 2.6, at bootup it does feature a memory test and a delay for a hard disk to spin up to speed. it also supports 16mhz clock speed and the high density floppy on the Mega STe computers (although not all the mega ste had the HD floppies though). I cant remember what else at the moment."

Edward Baiz adds:

"I would think the Link II is what you want. I have one hooked up to my STe and allows me to add a hard drive and CD rom drive to it. B&C sells them for about $100..."

Ken Kosut asks about a popular type of desktop accessory:

"Is there a Mouse Accelerator/Screen Saver that is compatible with NVDI? (Besides the Atari one)

I tried turning off the screen accelerator of Warp 9, but it seems to conflict with NVDI. (Locks when booting)"

Derryck Croker tells Ken:

"Use NVDI’s mouse accelerator.

Twilight, Bubbles or After Dark are some choices for screen savers."

Steve Sweet adds:

"I use(d) Silkmouse as an mouse accelerator and Bubbles for my Screen saver."

Hallvard Tangeraas adds his preference:

"Same here, except that I use the built-in screensaver from SilkMouse with my STe and Mega STe as it doesn’t need a bunch of extra files and doesn’t load anything from the harddisk either.

Bubbles however is used on my Mac with MagiCMac as it’s got a more powerful CPU and a colour screen, so I’m definitely taking advantage of that!

You can find SilkMouse (screensaver and mouse-accelerator) among many places at my Notator user-group website (see my signature).
Just go to the "software" section."

Harry Sideras adds:

"You shouldn’t use Warp 9 with NVDI - they both try to speed up the screen but do it in differing ways (Warp 9 has compatibility issues).

NVDI’s CPX has its own screen accelerator.
I don’t use screensavers - just the screen blanker in MenuInfo"

Peter Feddersen asks about upgrading a 1040:

"The TOS in the STE is hosted on two 28 pin PROMs. I have the newest v2.06 TOS on two 32 pin EPROMS which fits straight into the TOS sockets. But it does not work. The Operating System does not boot up, but bombs repeatedly one second into the process.
What am I missing here?

Also, can I use a 1.4 MB disk drive straight away or do I need the Atari AJAX chip with 16MHz clock upgrade?

I once had the program XOR (Caged Artist), presumably in a cracked version 1.53. Do anybody in this NG have this program?"

Hallvard Tangeraas tells Peter:

"Yes, you need to change the jumper-settings on the STe main board first.
I believe I have this information available at my "Atari Launchpad" (see my signature), or if you hang on for a little while I’ll see about

digging it up and posting it here.

> Also, can I use a 1.4 MB disk drive straight away or do I need the Atari AJAX
> chip with 16MHz clock upgrade?

That's an eternal discussion here. Officially you need an AJAX chip to replace the WD-1772, but many people have reported good results with machines equipped with a WD-1772-02-02.
You also need a small circuit which changes between HD and DD modes according to which disk is inserted in the drive.
And of course a HD disk drive (PC disk drives can be used with minor modifications (I've also written about this in a file which is available at the hardware section of my Atari Launchpad).

> I once had the program XOR (Caged Artist), presumably in a cracked version
> 1.53. Do anybody in this NG have this program?

Ahem..... cracked software....
But the good news is that Xor (I think) as well as LOTS of other MIDI software titles have been released as freeware thanks to Tim Conrardy who's spent a lot of time contacting companies and individuals who stood behind these programs. I'm sure Tim you'll find one of Tim's post here (or rather in the "comp.sys.atari.st" newsgroup) with his URL as I don't have it in my head."

Well folks, that's it for this week. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - No "Q" To Be Released in U.S.!
"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""" 'Crash Bandicoot'! "Burnout"!
Violent Game Law Zapped!
And much more!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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Panasonic Says No DVD/GameCube Hybrid in U.S.

A hybrid DVD player and Nintendo GameCube video game console set for a December launch in Japan will not be released in the United States at all, a spokesman for Panasonic said on Friday.

Earlier this week in Tokyo, Panasonic, the consumer electronics brand of Matsushita Electric Industrial Co. Ltd., unveiled the ‘‘Q," which is a combination of a DVD player and Nintendo’s new console.

‘‘It’s simply a Japan device. ... Right now there are absolutely no plans for U.S. marketing," said Kurt Praschak, a Panasonic spokesman.

The GameCube itself uses a smaller disc than the standard DVD format and is unable to play DVDs. The two companies announced earlier this year that Panasonic would produce its own unit with licensed GameCube technology.

Panasonic plans to sell the device from Dec. 14 in Japan for the equivalent of around $325.

The two main competitors to the GameCube in the U.S. console market, the Microsoft Corp. Xbox and the Sony Corp. PlayStation 2, both can play DVDs.

The GameCube will launch on Nov. 18 at a retail price of $199. The Xbox launches on Nov. 15 at $299. The PS2, which launched in the U.S. in November 2000, also sells for $299.

Nintendo has said repeatedly in the past that its hardware is secondary to its games, and that it is not concerned with putting features like DVD playback in its devices.

A Nintendo spokesman said he was unaware if there were any licensing restriction in Panasonic’s deal with Nintendo that would keep the ‘‘Q" from being released in the United States.

Capcom Announces Genma Onimusha for Xbox

Capcom announced plans to release Genma Onimusha for the Xbox video game system from Microsoft. Scheduled to release in early 2002, Genma Onimusha is an enhanced version of the award-winning Onimusha Warlords that has sold more than 2 million units worldwide. The power of Xbox is utilized as Genma Onimusha displays more enemies simultaneously due to its powerful graphic capabilities, supports 5.1 Dolby Surround technology and more. Other new features that enhance its critically acclaimed gameplay include a new attack system, new areas, visuals and costumes, and a new soul rope-pulling fighting system. Set in 16th century Japan, with battle scenes inspired by famed Japanese director, Akira Kurosawa, Onimusha introduces players to Samanosuke, a legendary samurai warrior faced with a quest of epic proportions. Genma Onimusha is rated ‘M’ for mature audiences by the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB).

‘‘As part of our multi-platform strategy, Capcom is very excited to have several products in development for Xbox," said Robert Lindsey, senior vice president sales and marketing, Capcom Entertainment. ‘‘As our first product, Genma Onimusha takes advantage of the power of the system by delivering more action at one time and supporting 5.1 Dolby Surround technology. Our research and development team has outdone themselves by offering an entirely unique and incredibly detailed experience to the

massively successful Onimusha storyline."

‘‘As one of the premier software developers in the industry, we couldn’t be more pleased to have Capcom creating games for Xbox," said J. Allard, general manager, Xbox Platform. ‘‘We are working very closely with Capcom’s development team to ensure they have all the tools to deliver hit products that will utilize the power of our system. We look forward to having a long and prosperous relationship with Capcom."

Genma Onimusha for Xbox boasts all-new features including:

-- Burst Attack -- This Xbox exclusive special charge attack allows players to execute a visually stunning super attack that is devastating to the undead soldiers of old-world Japan. This attack allows players to capture the souls of their opponent through charging the character’s burst attack power.

-- All-new areas and visuals -- Players will delight in the visual masterpiece that is the world of Onimusha as they are treated to all-new areas and cut-scenes.

-- Soul Rope-Pulling System -- Adding a completely new dimension to game play, this Xbox exclusive fighting system allows players to battle with their opponent over souls that are released during battle. This action will make strategy and quick reflexes even more important to game play.

-- All-new enemies -- Genma Onimusha introduces three new unearthly creatures to the critically acclaimed world of Onimusha.

-- New Costumes -- The beautifully rendered detail of Samanosuke comes to life even more as players are given access to new costumes. Each costume possesses a unique design and immense detail.

-- New Enemy Power -- Enemies become more powerful as they are successful in stealing souls from Samanosuke. If Samanosuke is successful in defeating these enemies, they will drop more souls than a regular enemy.

Genma Onimusha takes place in a world of darkness and magic, when power hungry warlords battle for control of Feudal Japan. One brave Samurai, Samanosuke, boldly volunteers to rescue the kidnapped princess Yuki, but even Samanosuke does not realize the desperation of this mission. An entire legion of demon warriors stands between him and his mission to avenge the princess.

Genma Onimusha features a number of high production values including an award-winning five minute opening movie animation created using an optical motion capture system to ‘‘film" six samurais battling simultaneously. Onimusha’s other motion picture quality production values include a script written by Flagship, the company who penned the story lines for the Resident Evil series; a 200-piece orchestra who performs the original musical score; and famed Japanese actor Takeshi Kaneshiro as the lead character. Genma Onimusha takes advantage of the power of Xbox by delivering finely detailed character graphics created at 10,000 polygons per character.

EA Ships NBA LIVE 2002 for the PlayStation 2 and PlayStation

The Best-Selling Basketball Series of All Time is Back and Better Than Ever

EA announced it’s shipping NBA LIVE 2002 for the PlayStation 2 computer entertainment system and the PlayStation under its EA SPORTS brand. The eighth installment in the best-selling basketball franchise of all-time, NBA LIVE 2002 gives players a realistic sense of what it’s like to be on the court battling in the paint, pounding the glass or fighting through a screen, breaking off a defender and popping a game-winning jumper to win the NBA Championship.

‘‘We started with the goal of making NBA LIVE 2002 the complete basketball experience; from pregame to postgame and everything in-between," said producer Kevin Wilkinson. ‘‘Our focus was improving the gameplay and making the game so real that it feels like the player at home is actually perspiring underneath the hot arena lights. We added amazing pre-game locker room scenes, bench scenes, player interaction, in addition to new shooting and passing physics, over 50 dunks and a variety of new finishing moves close to the basket."

NBA LIVE 2002 possesses numerous new features that will keep players going from the preseason through the NBA Finals. Players can build their own dynasty, like the Lakers of the 1980’s or the Bulls of the 1990’s, in the all-new Franchise Mode. In Franchise Mode, players manage an NBA franchise for up to 10 years and run the teams day-to-day operations. Players can view scouting reports on rookies coming out of school and then draft them to replace retired players and outgoing free agents. Trades are another option, but the salary cap must be heeded or the trade will be rejected. Franchise Mode allows players to take teams and make them uniquely theirs.

Another key enhancement to NBA LIVE 2002 is in the area of gameplay. NBA LIVE 2002 features unprecedented player control around the basket. The improved play in the paint features various new post moves, lay-ups and dunks, as well as more control in relation to shot positioning and selection. Players also have control on defense and in rebounding like never before. There are over 50 dunks and numerous all-new lay-ups, giving players additional scoring options around the hoop. EA SPORTS motion captured Kevin Garnett and Stromile Swift to produce incredibly fluid and realistic in-game animations and achieve the ultimate in video game realism.

EA SPORTS is proud to feature Michael Jordan in NBA LIVE 2002 wearing No. 23 for the Washington Wizards. EA SPORTS has exclusive marketing rights for the greatest player of all-time and plans to use him on back of pack as well as in print and television advertisements.

In NBA LIVE 2002, life-like bodies and heads make every cyber-player the spitting image of their real-life counterpart, right down to cornrows, afros, tattoos, player accessories, and over 50 styles of shoes. Adding to that are new cutting-edge facial animations that show players tracking the ball, surveying the floor for an open man, discussing calls with the refs and celebrating big plays. It’s almost like sitting courtside at an actual NBA game.

Adding to the NBA-like drama are cinematic pregame moments featuring scripted sequences showing players getting themselves and their teammates

hyped and ready to play. New cameras, featuring special effects like motion blur and letterboxing, capture emotional and replay them for players in stunning detail.

NBA LIVE 2002 is rated ‘‘E" (Everyone) by the ESRB. NBA LIVE 2002 is analog controller compatible and supports up to eight players. Consumers may purchase the game directly at the EA Store (http://www.eastore.ea.com) for a suggested retail price of $49.95, while the PlayStation version retails for $39.95. NBA LIVE 2002 will also be available on the Xbox video game console from Microsoft in December 2001.

Infogrames to Launch Three Games on Xbox

Infogrames, Europe’s biggest video games maker, will launch two new games -- NASCAR Heat 2002 and Test Drive Underground -- when Microsoft launches its new Xbox games console on November 15 in the United States, the French company said on Tuesday.

Infogrames also said in a statement that it will launch a third game, TransWorldSurf, following the Xbox launch.

Infogrames is also developing 20 other games for Xbox that will be available during the next 12 months, the company said.

Universal Interactive Ships ’Crash Bandicoot: The Wrath of Cortex’ For PlayStation2

Universal Interactive announced that ’Crash Bandicoot: The Wrath of Cortex,’ co-published with KONAMI CORPORATION, has shipped to retailers nationwide. Crash’s debut on the PlayStation2 computer entertainment system was developed by celebrated studio Traveller’s Tales, based in the United Kingdom. The new title features the most realistic special effects ever seen in a Crash game and offers exceptional replayability with more than 40 hours of gameplay, multiple play modes, time trial sequences, and five bosses in more than 30 levels.

‘‘’Crash Bandicoot’ is a powerful franchise that is making its move to the PlayStation2 computer entertainment system," said Jim Wilson, president of Universal Interactive. ‘‘Brand new moves, amazing vehicles, stunning environments and new characters catapult ’Crash Bandicoot: The Wrath of Cortex’ to a next-generation platform -- and to the next level of gaming."

’Crash Bandicoot’ is among the best selling character-based game franchises in the history of the PlayStation game console. The ’Crash’ franchise has sold more than 24 million units worldwide, with more than 10 million units sold in North America alone. ’Crash Bandicoot: The Wrath of Cortex’ is rated E for Everyone and will be offered at a SRP of $49.99.

EA Delivers Unique Action Racing With Release of Cel Damage for Xbox Game System

Enter the wacky world of cartoon animation filled with auto combat and mayhem. Under the EA GAMES brand, Electronic Arts announces the highly anticipated release of Cel Damage for the Xbox video game system from Microsoft.

Cel Damage uses cel animation technology that allows the game to look and feel like a unique hand-painted cartoon universe. The constant wacky action takes place in 12 interactive levels spread over four themed worlds of a universe controlled by ‘toons, ranging in style from Fowl Mouth, an old black and white cartoon duck from the ‘30s, to an anime-style manga girl named Violet and a rude, crude, gross-out ‘toon named Sinder. Cel Damage initially offers six unique characters and challenges the player to unlock four additional characters for a total of 10. Adding to the overall game experience, each of the characters has their own unique vehicle as well as specialized weapon.

The game offers three different modes of gameplay -- Smack Attack, Flag Rally and Gate Relay. Cel Damage features a total of 36 outrageous weapons such as giant axes, portable black holes, shrink rays, mallets, harpoons, machine guns and more. Cel Damage will support up to four players in multiplayer mode via split screen.

Cel Damage for the Xbox carries a ‘‘T" (Teen) ESRB rating and MSRP of US$49.95. In addition, EA is scheduled to release a Nintendo GameCube version by the end of 2001. Cel Damage for the Xbox and Gamecube is developed by Pseudo Interactive, a Toronto-based development company.

Acclaim Entertainment, Inc. Accelerates Into Holiday Season With Highly Anticipated Arcade Driving Game, ‘Burnout’, for the PlayStation 2

The holiday season is off to a fast and furious start as Acclaim Entertainment, Inc. has shipped Burnout, one of the year’s most highly anticipated video games for the PlayStation2 computer entertainment system. Created by Criterion Games Limited, an award-winning developer of interactive entertainment, Burnout is an arcade-style driving game that has the gaming industry buzzing with its stunning next-generation graphics and white-knuckle, foot-to-the-floor game play.

Burnout is backed by a multi-tiered marketing campaign that includes national print and television advertising, online contests and a dedicated site on www.acclaim.com. In addition, the game is one of the few titles that Sony International will support this holiday season with co-marketing dollars throughout the European markets.

‘‘Burnout is poised to set new benchmarks in the genre this holiday season and is a ‘must have’ title for PlayStationfi2 owners who want to experience the rush of true next-generation racing," said Evan Stein, vice president of Brand. ‘‘There is already tremendous demand for the game among consumers and we are thrilled to have it within our diverse multi-platform holiday lineup."

The dedicated video game press had this to say about Burnout:

* ‘‘The best crashes ever" - IGN.com
* ‘‘One intense racing game"- Official PlayStation Magazine

* ‘‘A speed demon’s dream" - HOTGAMES.com
* ‘‘Fast and Furious" - PlayStation Magazine
* ‘‘Hardcore foot-to-the-floor action" - Console Domain

Burnout was inspired by some of the most memorable car chase scenes from the greatest action films of all time. The game features an incredibly sophisticated and intelligent traffic system, which challenges players to race to the finish line at breakneck speeds through a myriad of trucks, cars and buses. With dramatic crashes possible with every turn of the wheel, competing drivers are rewarded for pushing the envelope and their skills to the extreme. Burnout also includes a simulated in-game heart monitor, which rewards the player with incredible bursts of speed as their pulse increases with every risk they take.

Burnout offers a broad array of features, including:

* Real-time vehicle crashes, highlighted by multiple-camera instant replays;
* 16 exciting courses, each filled with unique challenges and obstacles, spanning the United States and Europe;
* Multiplayer split-screen action for head-to-head competition;
* More than 300 vehicles on each course to collide with;
* Intelligent traffic system, featuring three distinct types of driver behaviors;
* Dolby Digital surround sound technology;
* Dual-shock controller compatible, letting players feel every turn and crunch of the car!

Burnout is available for the PlayStation2 computer entertainment system at a suggested retail price of $49.99.

Infogrames Reinvents Atari With Shipment of MXrider, Splashdown For PlayStation 2

- Next-Gen Motocross, Watercraft Racers Showcase Atari’s Exhilarating, Genre-Defining Attitude -

- Titles to Receive Global Launch -

Infogrames, Inc. announced that its Atari brand is returning anew this holiday. Reaching stores throughout the U.S. and Europe this past week, MXrider for the Sony PlayStation2 computer entertainment system is the first game to launch under the new Atari banner with its over-the-top motocross racing action. Come the week of November 5th, the highly anticipated, ultra- realistic personal watercraft racer, Splashdown will also be sporting the Atari name in retail outlets around the globe.

‘‘The Atari name is synonymous with only the best in video games," said Bruno Bonnell, Chairman and CEO of Infogrames. ‘‘Splashdown and MXrider truly embody the spirit of the reinvented Atari with game play innovation and uniqueness, next-generation quality, and hours of addictive fun that will define genres. Atari is back -- and in a big way!"

In a rare move, Infogrames is providing both MXrider and Splashdown with a global launch, releasing the games to an estimated 15,000 retail outlets in the U.S. and 23,800 outlets internationally the week of October 22nd and

November 5th, respectively.

‘‘As our inaugural Atari titles, MXrider and Splashdown are going to get a no-holds-barred release," commented Mr. Bonnell. ‘‘We want to insure that gamers around the world will have the chance to experience these exceptional titles and begin to appreciate what the reinvented Atari brand stands for."

The most complete motocross racing game available and developed by Infogrames’ highly regarded development studio, Paradigm Entertainment, MXrider features authentic motorbike speed and action with over 50 licensed Motocross World Championship riders (FIM: Federation Internationale Motocycliste) in all three motorbike classes (125cc, 250cc and 500 cc).

Each of MXrider’s 29 tracks is a living, breathing environment with waving flags and animated track officials, spectators, cheerleaders and cameramen. Locations include 17 motocross tracks found in 13 countries such as France, Italy and The Netherlands. Officially licensed track designers were employed to create six specially designed Supercross tracks in cities like Tokyo and Los Angeles. In addition, six fantasy arenas were designed exclusively for freestyle sessions allowing players to pull off over 30 insane tricks -- some the pros won’t even try.

MXrider features a soundtrack containing a plethora of emerging alternative bands and a music customization option where players can choose which song they want to hear during each race. For more information about the game visit the official Web site at www.mxrider-game.com.

Splashdown is an advanced personal watercraft racing game developed by Rainbow Studios featuring licensed Sea-Doofi watercraft. The title takes full advantage of the groundbreaking power of the PlayStation 2 to render advanced aquatic effects like dynamic wakes, rolling waves and turbulence. Each of these physical attributes affects the way the watercrafts ride and respond to each turn, jump and trick, leading to spectacular bails and wrecks. Advanced, photo-realistic graphical effects, including water transparency, detailed reflections, and spraying water particles complement the cutting-edge physics to bring the aquatic world to life.

Players will select from eight wild riders, each equipped with hilarious dialogue as well as unique attributes and skill levels for speed, acceleration, handling, and stability. Five licensed Sea-Doo watercraft, each tuned with different physics and performance capabilities lend an air of authenticity to the game.

Racers will blaze through 47 exquisitely detailed courses in 18 locations, including the Amazon jungle, Bali, Hawaii, the Nile River, Venice and many others. Course layouts range from narrow, twisting riverbeds to wide-open, wavy oceans. Players will also face off in stadiums equipped with jumps and pools that create supercross-style tracks.

Splashdown includes a unique performance meter feature that when kept full, enhances character skills and increases the speed of players’ Sea-Doo watercrafts. To keep the performance meter at maximum, players must navigate slalom buoys that dot courses. In addition, pulling off sick tricks during a race adds to the performance meter. Splashdown’s hearty tricks system offers more than 30 acrobatic stunts per character, including an exclusive ‘‘signature trick," such as Cyclone, Top Spin, Ferris Wheel and more.

Splashdown boasts a thumping soundtrack featuring both licensed and

original music from top artists and the hottest up-and-coming acts. Artists appearing on the soundtrack include Blink 182, Smashmouth, Sum 41, Groovie Ghoulies and many more.

MXrider shipped to most retail stores this week donning the new Atari brand with an estimated street price of $49.95 and an ESRB rating of ’E’ for everyone. Splashdown will flash its Atari colors at most retail outlets on Nov. 6th with an estimated retail price of $49.95 and an ESRB rating of ’T’ for Teens.

Universal Interactive Ships Spyro: Season of Ice for the Game Boy Advance

Universal Interactive confirmed that Spyro: Season of Ice has shipped to stores nationwide. Appearing for the first time ever on a Nintendo handheld console and featuring an entirely new adventure, Spyro: Season of Ice for Game Boy Advance was developed by acclaimed studio Digital Eclipse Software, Inc.

Spyro’s latest escapade begins when a wicked wizard freezes all the fairies throughout the Fairy Realms. Determined to save his friends, Spyro embarks on an action-packed adventure through 25 enchanted levels including the Lava Prairie, Honey Marsh and Star Park. Players control classic Spyro gliding, flaming and hovering abilities in vast, isometric 3D platform-jumping levels, fast-paced speedway rounds and arcade-style top-down levels.

‘‘Universal Interactive recognized the strong appeal of the Spyro the Dragon franchise for the handheld market and made a strategic decision to publish an all-new adventure for the Game Boy Advance," said Jim Wilson, president of Universal Interactive. ‘‘Filled with collectible gems, mini-games and all new bosses, Spyro: Season of Ice offers the complete Spyro gameplay experience."

The Spyro the Dragon franchise has sold more than eight million units worldwide. Rated E for Everyone, the new action/platform title, Spyro: Season of Ice, is designed for players of all ages and is available at a SRP of $39.99.

Supreme Court Zaps Violent Game Law

The U.S. Supreme Court upheld a decision by a lower appeals court to block the enforcement of an Indianapolis law that required children to have parental consent and/or supervision when playing arcade games that are deemed too violent.

The law, which was adopted on July 10, was aimed at shielding minors from arcade games that depict violence and strong sexual content. It required arcade operators to separate violent games from other arcade units and display signs that explicitly state the requirement of parental consent to play.

As reported, following the initial enforcement of the law in Indianapolis, several game publishers and trade organizations challenged the law by

arguing that it violated the First Amendment.

The law was at first ruled constitutional by a federal court, but that decision was overturned by the 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Chicago, which ruled that the law did indeed infringe on the rights of free speech and expression.

The U.S. Supreme Court upheld that ruling without further comment.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Microsoft Belatedly Opens Access to MSN

After being shut out of one of the most popular sites on the Internet last week, many non-Microsoft browsers on Monday were finally able to access the software giant's MSN.com page.

As first reported by CNET News.com, some Mozilla and Opera users were enraged Thursday when they could not reach the upgraded MSN site. Instead, they were given the option of downloading a version of Microsoft's Internet Explorer. That same day, Microsoft buckled to protests and said it would open its site to other browsers.

But the uproar spilled into Friday as many Mozilla and Opera users found themselves still locked out.

The episode also raised the ire of Washington-based trade group ProComp, which asked state and federal trustbusters to get involved.

The ongoing antitrust lawsuit against Microsoft, now moving into what should be its final stage, got its start in the mid-1990s because of concerns that the company was using its dominant position in operating system software to gain an unfair market advantage for its Internet Explorer browser.

U.S. Reaches Settlement with Microsoft

Microsoft and the U.S. Justice Department on Friday announced a settlement in their three-year-old antitrust case, with the software giant accepting restrictions on its business practices but avoiding harsher penalties.

The pact, which must be endorsed by a federal judge, gives computer makers freedom to feature software made by companies other than Microsoft, and requires Microsoft to share the inner workings of its Windows operating system with other software makers.

Although the business restrictions are a far cry from splitting the company in two, a remedy sought under the administration of President Bill Clinton, attorneys general from some of the 18 states that joined the government suit saw merit in the settlement.

Microsoft Chairman Bill Gates called the pact ‘‘fair and reasonable," and U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft said the agreement would end ‘‘unlawful conduct" by the company. A number of Wall Street analysts called the agreement a ‘‘win" for Microsoft.

If approved, the settlement would end a legal battle in which Microsoft was found to have illegally maintained a monopoly in personal computer operating systems.

The agreement aims to rewrite the rules of the computer business so that consumers will be able to buy machines loaded with a variety of different software, not just those features that are preselected by Microsoft, the Justice Department said.

The settlement would allow computer manufacturers to work with other software developers and place their products on Microsoft’s Windows system, and would prevent the software giant from punishing anyone who makes or uses competing products, the Justice Department said.

It would require Microsoft to provide software developers with the interfaces necessary to inter-operate with Windows. The company would also have to offer uniform licensing terms to key computer makers.

Also, Microsoft will have to modify its new Windows XP operating system within a matter of months so that software can be added and deleted by consumers and computer makers, the department said.

The pact ‘‘will put an end to Microsoft’s unlawful conduct and bring effective relief to the marketplace and ensure that consumers will have more choices in meeting their needs of computing and working with their computers," Ashcroft told a news conference.

Gates said the settlement would impose some tough rules and restrictions on the company’s business but resolving the case now was the right thing to do.

‘‘The settlement is fair and reasonable and, most important, is in the best interests of consumers and the economy," Gates said in a statement.

Alan Loewenstein, a portfolio co-manager at John Hancock Technology Fund, which owns shares in Microsoft, said the proposed settlement looked very favorable to the company.

‘‘It’s the best thing for the company. They didn’t split the company up. They didn’t say you have to unbundle things," said Loewenstein.

Drew Brosseau, an analyst at SG Cowen, said: ‘‘I don’t think it can be viewed as anything but a win for Microsoft."

The Justice Department said the restrictions on Microsoft would be in effect for five years and may be extended for an additional two years if the judge finds the company engaged in multiple violations of the agreement.

Computer makers and consumers would be allowed to substitute competing software on the Windows system, according to the settlement.

Microsoft would be banned from signing agreements with software makers and computer manufacturers that require exclusive support or development of Microsoft software. This will allow rival manufacturers to work with Microsoft and at the same time support and develop rival products.

The pact would require Microsoft to have a panel of three independent, on-site, full-time computer experts to help enforce the settlement.

Rivals said they were unhappy with the proposed deal because it would not in their view promote competition and protect consumers.

‘‘The proposed settlement fails to fulfill the promise of the unanimous decision from the U.S. Court of Appeals condemning Microsoft’s extensive illegal conduct and requiring an effective remedy to prevent its reoccurrence," said Paul Cappuccio, general counsel for Internet giant AOL Time Warner Inc.

At a hearing on Friday, District Court Judge Colleen Kollar-Kotelly granted the states until Tuesday to examine the settlement.

Three of the state attorneys general who have been the most critical of Microsoft after the hearing praised the idea of a settlement and said they would present it to the other states over the next few days.

Iowa Attorney General Tom Miller said outside the court that ‘‘there is optimism" about joining the settlement, but he said there were no guarantees.

The attorneys general of Connecticut and New York sounded a similar note.

‘‘This settlement reaches results now, in real time, well before any litigation would have produced results," said Connecticut Attorney General Richard Blumenthal. ‘‘It holds the prospect for making the market in this industry more competitive, enabling and enhancing innovation, benefiting consumers in very real and significant ways."

Antitrust experts said the states are under pressure to go along with the Justice Department deal and would be unlikely to get a tougher remedy on their own, they said.

Kollar-Kotelly had pressed the government and the company to settle the case. She ordered the two sides into intensive settlement talks on Sept. 28, saying a quick resolution of the case had become more important ‘‘in light of the recent tragic events affecting our nation" -- a reference to the Sept. 11 attacks on New York and Washington.

The attorneys general said last month’s attacks had indeed added a sense of urgency to the settlement talks.

‘‘The world changed on Sept. 11," Blumenthal said. ‘‘The war abroad, the threats at home, the cloud on our economy have created a very powerful dynamic for resolving the issues in this case."

The case returned to the district court after an appeals court in June agreed that Microsoft had used its monopoly in personal computer operating systems illegally. But the appeals court reversed an order by trial court Judge Thomas Penfield Jackson that would have split the company in two.

At his press conference, Ashcroft rejected any suggestion that the settlement was weak.

‘‘We believe that this settlement is a very strong settlement and that it not only encompasses the relief that was signaled by the court of appeals but that this has additional safeguards," Ashcroft said.

Most of the original case against Microsoft focused on the tactics the company used to drive rival Netscape Communications Corp. out of the market for Internet browsers, but the trial became a broad examination of the company’s business practices.

Some analysts warn that the legal fallout from the trial is not over for Microsoft. The findings of the federal courts can be used by private parties in suits against the company.

‘‘We remind investors that it’s not over yet. Microsoft still has legal proceedings with other jurisdictions," said J.P. Morgan Securities analyst Chris Galvin.

States May Seek Microsoft Extension

The state attorneys general involved in the Microsoft Corp. antitrust case may ask a federal judge to extend a Friday deadline for settling the landmark case, a source close to the negotiations said on Thursday.

The states are considering asking U.S. District Court Judge Colleen Kollar-Kotelly for extra time to consider whether they will go along with a settlement deal reached by Microsoft and the U.S. Justice Department, the source said.

It’s still not clear exactly how long an extension the states may request, the source said.

Representatives of the 18 states in the case spent Thursday studying the settlement proposal and hashing through possible changes with the department.

Europe Proposes Banning Web Cookies

The European Commission is encountering strong opposition to its proposed ban on computer cookies -- an Internet technology that stores information on Web surfers -- but even ardent privacy advocates in the U.S. say the cookie should not crumble.

Experts say that in contrast to the legislative approach taken by the European Commission, cookies in the U.S. are mostly self-regulated by the companies using them on their Web sites. Advertisers and site operators say cookies are needed to make Internet experiences interactive and more personalized.

And while there are concerns as to what exactly is stored in a cookie -- which can include name, zip code, age and surfing habits -- privacy

proponents say that cookies do not pose a serious threat to privacy as long as users are aware of posted Web site policies, which are policed by the Federal Trade Commission and other regulatory agencies.

In response to the European Commission proposal, the UK's Interactive Advertising Bureau has begun a campaign called "Save our Cookies," claiming that a ban on the browser technology would cost British companies hundreds of millions of pounds in revenue.

U.S. privacy advocates add that banning cookies, which would be technically difficult or even impossible, is not the right approach.

"Not all cookies are bad and not all are used to profile," Electronic Privacy Information Center (EPIC) legislative counsel Chris Hoofnagle told NewsFactor Network. "We're not against technology in general, and a ban on cookies seems to be a ban on technology."

Privacy advocates and advertising industry representatives agree that there is some misuse of cookie technology to track or gather data on Internet users, but sites and companies that engage in the practice pay the price of lost customers or even prosecution.

Hoofnagle pointed out that the FTC watches privacy policies and adherence to them closely, cracking down on violators.

Observers say the legitimacy of a Web site and what companies do with user information can either attract or repel potential customers, and most Web users prefer the personalization and interaction made possible by cookies.

While some experts say that existing state and federal law could be applied to computer cookies, EPIC's Hoofnagle said a better approach is legal protection from companies that collect personally identifiable information.

Experts say new technologies such as Microsoft's Windows XP operating system -- which is highly integrated into the Internet -- and P3P, a privacy protection technology that involves registration by Web site operators, are likely to fuel the debate over cookies.

But most observers agree that Web site and company privacy policies, as well as adherence to them, are the best regulators of cookies.

Anti-spam Fight Falls to the States

Opponents of junk e-mail are claiming victory in a high-profile spam case this week, saying recent action in the U.S. Supreme Court effectively grants states the right to rein in spammers in the absence of federal anti-spam laws.

On Monday, the high court declined to hear a constitutional challenge to a tough Washington state anti-spam law, one of the nation's first measures that sets standards for junk e-mailers and levies stiff fines for violators. Enacted in 1998, the law bans "deceptive" e-mail and has drawn immediate attention as a test case for the role of states in regulating the Internet.

The court's refusal to review the case does not offer a legal ruling on

the merits of the law. But with little hope for federal anti-spam legislation any time soon, the decision means beleaguered consumers can fight junk e-mail at the state level, anti-spam advocates say.

"Through this decision, the Supreme Court said it’s voting for the status quo," said Tom Geller, who runs the SpamCom Foundation. "It’s saying at the highest federal level, that the state laws are valid and enforceable."

Monday’s ruling allows a trial to go forward in Seattle’s King County Superior Court in a lawsuit against Jason Heckel and his company, Natural Instincts. The suit, filed by the state Attorney General Christine Gregoire in 1998, charges that Heckel sent millions of commercial e-mails with misleading subject lines, including "Did I get the right e-mail address?"

The Supreme Court’s decision comes as proposed federal legislation governing commercial e-mail has fallen flat in Congress in recent years. As frustration mounts over the daily onslaught of spam, consumers are increasingly looking toward state laws for protection. Some states have responded with laws that are even tougher than the state of Washington’s.

In defense, marketers such as Heckel are seeking recourse by challenging state laws on grounds that they violate the interstate commerce clause of the U.S. Constitution, which prevents states from enacting laws that interfere with business across state lines.

Those arguments have had some success. Last year, for example, a California state judge found parts of California’s anti-spam laws violated the commerce clause.

In contrast, the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision lets stand a ruling in June by the Washington Supreme Court, which unanimously backed the constitutionality of that state’s anti-spam statute. The law prevents the transmission of e-mail communications that include a false header, misleading subject line or a fraudulent originating address.

The Washington Supreme Court ruled that the law does not violate the commerce clause because "the requirement of an advertiser be truthful does not burden commerce as much as it facilitates it by eliminating fraud and deception." The defendants also say that the law violated the First Amendment, but the court rejected those arguments as well.

Heckel faces penalties of up to $2,000 per violation, or per deceptive e-mail sent, which is subject to interpretation based on Washington law.

Defense attorneys for Heckel charge that Washington state’s law is unconstitutional on the grounds that it restricts free speech under the First Amendment and that it restricts interstate commerce.

"Any regulation needs to come from the federal government," said Dale Crandall, a Salem, Ore.-based attorney representing Heckel. "We think the Internet needs to be treated like the oceans and coastlines and navigable waterways. The federal government has jurisdiction over the oceans, and we view the Internet to be similar."

Anti-spam advocates say that the U.S. Supreme Court’s move is a boon for state spam laws and could pave the way for federal legislation, but not in the near future.

"The chances of a federal law aren’t looking all that great," said Ray

Everett-Church, a privacy consultant and anti-spam advocate. "But if Washington's statute gets upheld, states may decide that that's a good model. And a strong state statute could point the way for a successful federal statute, but that's a long way down the road."

Regina Cullen, assistant attorney general in Washington's Consumer Protection Division, said Monday's action is a win for consumers, who for now can count on state, as well as possible future, federal protection against spam.

"To me, the states are the first line of defense in protecting consumers," she said. "If the decision went the other way, that would point out the need for federal laws governing spam. But I think there could be a two-pronged approach where we have complementary state and federal laws where all levels of government can work to protect consumers from Internet fraud."

Napster Postpones Launch Until Early 2002

The once-popular music-swapping Web site Napster announced Monday that the third scheduled relaunch of the company's service will now be postponed until next year.

Speaking at a technology conference in Los Angeles on Monday, Napster CEO Konrad Hilbers told the audience that the company needs to secure additional major-label music before it is ready for public consumption. Hilbers said he expected the service to be open by the first quarter of 2002.

However, according to published reports, the terms of Napster's agreement with MusicNet prohibit the file-sharing service from seeking additional contracts with major labels.

Closed down since July, Napster is backed by US$25 million from German media firm Bertelsmann. Napster is in a partnership with MusicNet, a joint venture of Warner, BMG and EMI, to provide the company's site with licensed content. Rivals Sony and Universal have combined to create another online music service, Pressplay.

The two services were created as industry-backed alternatives to services like Napster. Both plan to launch later this year.

Although Napster's delay is blamed in part on the need to license additional content, which Hilbers acknowledged to be the Redwood City, California-based company's "biggest hurdle," the announcement comes during a federal investigation into Pressplay and MusicNet.

Earlier this month, according to published reports, the Department of Justice's (DOJ) Antitrust Division issued a flurry of civil investigative demands (CIDs) to the five major record labels, their respective joint ventures, and the recording industry's lobbying group, the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA). MusicNet and RIAA confirmed that they received the requests.

The DOJ is investigating potential instances of anti-competitive licensing that could have allowed the companies to fix rates and terms for the use of its music online.

Several smaller companies attending the conference confirmed that they had also received CIDs from the Justice Department in the probe.

Matt Graves, spokesman for Listen.com, an online music subscription Web site poised to launch in the coming week, confirmed the company had received a CID, and "expect this will lead to a formal testimony under subpoena."

In an ironic twist, if the major record labels refuse to share their music, Napster's Hilbers has urged Congress to intervene and possibly pass mandatory licensing laws, "before the buzz wears off."

Aram Sinnreich, a senior analyst with Jupiter Media Metrix, told NewsFactor Network that the Justice Department potentially has a very good argument against the major labels.

The labels show evidence of exercising "a demonstrable amount of control, that seems much greater than what the technology calls for," Sinnreich told NewsFactor.

"It seems they could be more liberal in their distribution [of digital music] without losing potential market revenues and market share."

Sinnreich cautioned that it is all still a very gray area and that it is tough to say whether the DOJ could put together a viable case. At the same time, however, Sinnreich said that the investigation might lead to self-policing actions on the part of the Big Five labels in order to avoid further scrutiny, which could be "a good thing" for Napster and its peers.

A Jupiter Media Metrix study released earlier this month indicated that while Napster usage dropped to 5.5 million unique users in August, down from 10.8 million in March, usage of alternative music sharing services grew 492 percent, from 1.2 million to 6.9 million, during that time.

Web sites such as Morpheus, Kazaa Media Desktop, Winmx and Aimster were among the leading Napster alternatives.

Charles Buchwalter, vice president of media research for Jupiter, said in a statement that a "strong fan base still exists for file-swapping services."

Added Jupiter vice president and senior analyst Mark Mooradian: "Word-of-mouth is driving a new round of exponential growth for next-generation file-sharing services, despite fragmented audiences."

Hotmail To Junk Inactive Members

Microsoft has told members of its free Hotmail service that their e-mail accounts will be closed if they do not use them at least once a month.

"Accounts reaching 30 days of inactivity are formally deactivated and all messages, folders, and contacts are permanently deleted," the software giant told Hotmail users in an e-mail Wednesday.

The rule does not apply to its MSN Hotmail Extra Storage accounts, which cost $12.95 per year and provide five times more storage space, the

company said.

During the early days of the commercial Web, people often signed up for multiple e-mail accounts at different portals--sometimes creating new accounts for no other reason than because they had forgotten previous passwords or IDs. Since the name of the game at the time was to show growing numbers of members to attract more advertising, portals often looked the other way, in deference to their inflated membership numbers.

But Microsoft’s move comes at a time when companies are trying to lower the cost of providing free services while also trying to migrate people to premium services.

eBay Users Unhappy With "Checkout" Feature

A new feature on eBay billed as a way to ease transactions has instead rankled many sellers, with some threatening to leave the online auction site.

The new feature, dubbed "Checkout," provides buyers with detailed information on charges and prompts them for shipping and payment information. Many sellers have balked at the feature, saying it poorly duplicates their own end-of-auction e-mails, gives out private information and does not let them opt out of it.

"Checkout as an idea was an excellent one, but Checkout as an implementation was pathetic," said Bob Miller, one of eBay’s top sellers. "It was a mistake for them to roll out such an incomplete product at this time of the year without sufficient testing."

eBay spokesman Kevin Pursglove said Checkout was designed to address one of the most common complaints of eBay buyers: What to do after they have won an auction. However, Pursglove said "a lot" of sellers have complained about the feature.

San Jose, Calif.-based eBay plans to continue to monitor feedback on Checkout during the next several weeks and address people’s complaints, Pursglove said.

"We still want to hear from a much larger segment of our community," he said.

But that may be too long for some sellers who say they are already moving to other venues.

Deb Fazio, for instance, used to list 100 items a week with eBay, but she is in the process of moving everything over to SellYourItem.com, an eBay competitor.

"This is more than I can handle at this point," said Fazio, a Havlock, N.C., resident. "This is the icing on the cake."

The Checkout function is only latest change at eBay to draw the ire of the company’s users. Last month, many sellers criticized eBay’s Auction for America, the company’s fund-raising effort to benefit victims of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. Many charged that eBay was taking credit for their donations and that the effort was little more than a promotion for

Billpoint, eBay’s proprietary payment service.

This summer, many eBay sellers railed against a new service that recommended competitors’ items to their losing bidders. eBay later addressed sellers’ concerns by allowing them to opt out of the recommendation service.

Sellers using Checkout enter details such as shipping costs and taxes. These details show up on their item and allow buyers to quickly calculate how much their item will cost.

At the end of an auction, buyers press a Checkout button that gives them the total cost of their item and prompts them for their shipping address and credit card information if they are using eBay’s proprietary payment system.

Many sellers already use similar services from companies such as Andale and AuctionWorks to help buyers complete their purchases. But the Checkout process has duplicated these efforts, adding a flurry of new e-mail between buyers and sellers.

"This creates a lot of confusion in the marketplace when sellers already had a solution in place," said Paul Lundy, chief marketing officer of AuctionWorks. "This came along and threw a wrench in it."

Pursglove said the Checkout feature is an option and that buyers and sellers both can opt out of using it.

"Even if we have to fine tune this particular component, buyers and sellers ultimately have the say as to whether the system is going to be used," he said.

But many sellers say Checkout is not optional at all. Even if they choose not to enter any information into the Checkout form, a Checkout area still shows up on their auctions and eBay still prompts buyers to click a Checkout button on their auctions once they close.

"They need to look up the definition of optional in the ’Oxford English Dictionary’," said longtime eBay seller Michelle Carter, who lives in Louisville, Ky.

Another chief complaint is that the Checkout process replaces the personal communications sellers have with buyers. Many sellers send customized e-mails to buyers after their auctions end, often including their businesses’ logo and a personalized note. Although the Checkout form includes an area for sellers to write a note to buyers, many say that is not enough.

"I want to give my customers good customer service, and this is not doing it," said Fazio, who sells pottery and industrial tools.

Even more troubling to many sellers is that the Checkout process is automatically giving out private information such as home addresses and telephone numbers, which they say they would not otherwise share with buyers. Many submitted the information to eBay to set up their accounts, but typically give post office boxes or business phone numbers to customers.

"That was a very badly thought-out idea," said Miller, a Utah resident who sells collectible stamps and postcards on eBay. "People don’t like putting

their personal information out on the Net. They don’t trust it."

Pursglove acknowledged the problem, but noted that the private information was only being given out to the buyer and seller who were trying to complete a transaction.

"We are releasing information that sometimes people don’t want to give out," he said. "We clearly have to address that issue."

Other sellers complained that the feature lacks a "shopping cart," meaning that there is no way to automate multiple purchases from one seller. Meanwhile, some sellers charged that the feature was yet another way for eBay to push Billpoint. Even if a seller says that he or she does not accept Billpoint, a buyer using Checkpoint can request that he or she accept it.

"You can still say no, but it’s just an awkward spot to put a seller in," said Miller, who generally declines to accept Billpoint. "I think they pushed Billpoint a little too hard."

Although Miller said he would stay with eBay despite the problems, others say they are leaving for good. Carter, for instance, used to list 300 to 400 craft- and computer-related items each week on eBay. But she has just listed six items in the last week and is exploring other sites, including Yahoo.

"This is the straw that broke the camel’s back for a lot of sellers," she said. "It’s definitely the straw that broke Michelle’s back."

The turmoil over Checkout comes after an upbeat meeting with analysts Monday. Despite the economic downturn, eBay projected that it would continue to maintain its torrid growth rate and reaffirmed its commitment to reaching a previously stated goal of $3 billion in revenue by 2005.

Part of the company’s effort to reach that goal depends on drawing new buyers and sellers and getting them to conduct greater numbers of transactions on eBay. Pursglove declined to comment on whether the company has seen any downturn in the number of listings since it implemented Checkout. However, the company has consistently seen its listings increase, despite sporadic complaints from customers.

Bill Would Establish Kids Site

House lawmakers are considering having the government establish a kid-friendly Internet domain since the international body that governs domain names has refused to create a suffix for child-appropriate content.

The bill originally called for the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers to create a ‘‘.kids" domain, which would join other suffixes such as ‘‘.com" and ‘‘.org" found at the end of Web addresses.

But the measure was amended Thursday to create a ‘‘.kids.us" site, which would be overseen by the federal government.

Assistant Secretary of Commerce Nancy Victory told the House Subcommittee on Telecommunications and the Internet that Japan, China and some European countries had objected to the original legislation, saying the United

States should not establish guidelines for the World Wide Web.

‘‘Unilateral action by the United States to create an international ‘dot kids’ domain is at odds with the global nature of the Internet and a domain name system," Victory said.

Panel Chairman Fred Upton, R-Mich. said the change makes it more likely the plan will be adopted.

‘‘My view is that if we were to rely on (the Internet naming organization) to get its act together to implement a ‘dot kids,’ my young kids would be parents perhaps by the time it got done, if at all," he said.

The organization’s board voted against the .kids suffix last November amid concerns about who would set the standards for child-appropriate material.

The House bill says that only sites with material deemed appropriate for children under 13 could get a ‘‘.kids.us" suffix. Participation would be voluntary and the sites would be continuously monitored. A parent could restrict a child’s computer so it could only visit those sites.

The bill would establish an independent board that would set criteria for use of ‘‘.kids.us." It would also require that the domain be publicized to parents.

Rob Courtney, a policy analyst with the Center for Democracy and Technology, said putting ‘‘.kids" under the ‘‘.us" domain is an improvement. But he said his organization is still concerned about who will be responsible for monitoring, enforcing and funding the effort and about what standards will be used.

‘‘What a family in Peoria, Illinois, thinks is appropriate is likely to be different than a family in New York or San Francisco," he said.

Rep. Edward Markey, D-Mass., a sponsor of the bill, said because the use and registration of ‘‘.kids.us" space would be voluntary, there is no effort by the government to restrict access or otherwise infringe on civil liberties.

‘‘This proposal simply creates an area where healthy speech for children can exist and inappropriate speech is free to exist anywhere else," Markey said.

An Internet startup, New.net, has been offering ‘‘.kid" names, along with several other unsanctioned suffixes such as ‘‘.sport," ‘‘.xxx" and ‘‘.travel." But sites with the alternative names can only be viewed by using certain service providers or making adjustments to computer settings.

The Commerce Department has authority to issue ‘‘.us" Web space. The department has given NeuStar Inc. a contract to manage the space.

Victory said the Bush administration supports the goals of establishing a kid-safe domain, but said it may violate the NeuStar contract. Lawmakers on the subcommittee said they were frustrated that the department is not being cooperative and said they would give it authority to issue ‘‘.kids.us" space.

‘‘As a parent, I’m not interested in excuses," Upton told Victory. ‘‘I just want it done."

AOL Releases New Version of ICQ Messenger

The struggle for instant messaging (IM) dominance continues to produce new features and capabilities, the latest coming from Internet giant AOL, which released a new version of its ICQ service that allows messaging between PCs, cell phones, personal digital assistants (PDAs) and pagers.

AOL said it is building on ICQ's community of more than 115 million users to make the service more powerful and more flexible. Rivals -- particularly Microsoft -- have complained that AOL, the leading IM provider with ICQ and its AOL Instant Messenger, is thwarting interoperability.

Microsoft's answer to AOL's dominance was to integrate its own IM service, bolstered last month to include PC-telephone voice communication, into the Windows XP operating system, drawing criticism that the move is exclusionary.

The fierce competition over instant messaging, also heavily used in the corporate world, has resulted in a number of new customization and functionality features from AOL, Microsoft, Yahoo! and others.

AOL's latest ICQ version features different modes, colors and sounds; a graphically enhanced contact list; new tools to add extra features without rebooting; and a menu of services that include file transfer and file and directory sharing.

ICQ 2001b also allows wireless IM across multiple devices, so users can send "short message service" (SMS) text messages in three ways: from ICQ to a cell phone and back; from an ICQ Web messaging center to a cell phone and back; or from any e-mail client to a cellular phone. Cell phones must be SMS-enabled, but the cell phone recipient does not have to be an ICQ user, AOL said.

Still, Giga Information Group senior analyst Rob Enderle told NewsFactor Network that IM is still limited by its lack of interoperability, which forces many corporate users to have three or four systems on their computers.

"It would be nice if AOL's [ICQ] instant messaging could work with even its own AOL Instant Messenger," Enderle said. "Before instant messaging really takes off, each product has to be able to talk to the other."

Enderle said AOL, which recently has undertaken interoperability tests with IBM and Sun Microsystems IM systems, may be losing ground at the enterprise level.

"Microsoft appears to be gaining the upper hand there because they are already an enterprise provider," Enderle said.

AOL's new ICQ 2001b also features "customized and centralized security and privacy permissions." However, security experts continue to raise concerns over the vulnerability of the IM technology, which is relatively new.

SecurityFocus incident analyst Ryan Russell told NewsFactor that the increased features of IM mean an increased danger of attack.

"The number of features is directly related to the number of vulnerabilities," Russell said. "The more features you add, the more opportunity there is for someone to exploit you.

"It’s a real concern," Russell said, adding that user ignorance and mistakes such as sending passwords via IM often can foil even the best security measures.

Enderle noted that IM systems increasingly are being targeted by spammers, who send unsolicited e-mail over the communication platforms.

"IM systems are now becoming a home for spam," Enderle said. "It’s getting hit too hard with spam."

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